DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 482 CG 012 141

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TITLE Focussed Issue Advocacy: Corporal Punishment
PUB DATE 27 Aug 77
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (San Francisco, California, August 26-30, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Advocacy; *Children; *Corporal Punishment; *Intervention; *Psychologists; State of the Art Reviews

ABSTRACT

Psychologists are scientists, practicioners and ombudsmen for the public welfare. As such they can research the unknowns about corporal punishment, take into account its deleterious effects when assessing disturbed children, and most importantly, speak out publicly regarding the anachronistic, ccunterproductive and possibly perversion prone aspects of this ancient custom. Examples of interventions by a number of psychologists are given as well as a failure. (Author)

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Focussed Issue Advocacy: CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Presented at the convention of the American Psych. Assn. Aug. 27, 1977

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The American Psychological Association announces its purposes each month on the face page of the American Psychologist. It says: "The purpose of APA is to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting human welfare."

This trilogy of aims should not mean that there are three kinds of psychologists, but rather that each psychologist should wear three hats. Not everycne agrees; some still prefer to fractionate.

Some psychologists claim to be, and think psychology should be, exclusively scientific. They are adamant that a science of human behavior should be value free. This has led to experiments designed to find the most effective form of punishment to change behavior without regard to the use to be made of this knowledge. Who is to use these punishments? On whom? For what purpose? With what side effects? And with what eventual effect on the fabric of our society? This is not value free science. Implicit values of such research assign "rightness" to the current power elite and accord them ruthless authority. Values need to be made explicit since they exist in any case. By the topics you choose to explore are your values known.

Another group of psychologists prefer to be thought of as exclusively professional. They feel that what they are doing - alleviating emotional distress - is promoting human welfare. Some of these narrow professionals seriously define primary prevention as rescuing individual children after their wits have been dimmed by beatings so severe that even the judge high on his bench is finally convinced that the child is in danger.

Neither of these groups, let me hasten to add, is wrong. They are merely incomplete. Certainly we need freedom to investigate the full range of human behavior unhampered by ancient tabus. Certainly we need to care for the troubled on an individual basis since each needs an individual diagnosis and specialized treatment. But just as medical men moved from the romantically pictured all night vigil beside the sickbed of the child with typhoid fever and into the scientific search for the source of the typhoid infection and from there into the campaign for pure drinking water, so psychologists must move beyond diagnosing the defects of battered children into the search for the source of the social infection that permits it to happen, and from there into the campaign for greater political concern for children and children's rights.

Kenneth B. Clark said it better than I can. In The Pathos of Power he wrote:

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> The development of a science of social responsibility is... the only answer to the suicidal dance of violence.... Psychologists must dare to assume the new and difficult responsibility of serving as ombudsman to society; they must now be moral monitors seeking to influence the direction and quality of techno logy of social change, to mobilize its resources to attain social justice and to increase the chances of survival for the species.

Dr. Clark paved the way. Not only was he instrumental in desegregating American schools, he also played a large part in eliminating corporal punishment from Junior High No. 22 in New York City.

I have been asked to describe what child and developmental psychologists, and psychologists in general may be able to do for child advocacy. This perhaps I can do best by giving examples of what a variety of psychologists have done and are doing about corporal punishment of children in school.

Let me begin immodestly with myself. In 1972 we offered a symposium on corporal punishment for the APA convention program. Perhaps because attendance was off since Hawaii is a long expensive way away, the proposal was accepted although such a topic had never been offered before. The newspapers picked it up; the Honolulu Advertiser carried the story and Science News reported it. That would seem to be that. But one year after we had presented that picayune panel, the State of Hawaii abolished corporal punishment. Since then there have been efforts to restore it but thanks to another psychologist the prohibition has held firm.

Dr. Richard Dubanowski of the University of Hawaii at Manoa tells of his experience as expert witness testifying for theSenate Education Committee:

> My experience before the Senate Committee was enlightening. It was obvious from the beginning that the committee members were in favor of physical punishment of pupils. After my testimony, one Senator tried to discredit my statements sneering, "you're just a psychologist. You've never been in a classroom!" But I got my points too.
>
> They were having their laughs... The Superintendent joked to the Committee that the bill should be amended to include the use of the "Board of Education" against some senators. I pointed out that charges of assault and battery could be brought. "Is there equal protection under the law for adults and children?" It was clear that they got the point but they passed the bill anyway. Fortunately it was killed in the House. So the present stature remains. If they try again next year, I'll be on hand.
>
> Our big task is to find successful methods of curbing an accelerating degree of serious disciplinary problems in the schools. If we can demonstrate effective non-punitive methods, then we have the best defense when we are challenged" "Show me a better way!"

With a giant leap let us leave Hawaii and look at what happened in Maine. There was a slightly different situation. The Attorney General of the State of Maine discovered that the criminal code effectively forbade corporal punishment of school children. Many states have anachronistic lists of exception in their definition of manslaughter. All but forgottenlaws state that if accidental death occurs while a master is chastising his servant (read slave) or a schoolmaster his scholar, this shall be accounted excusable homicide and shall not be prosecuted. Maine was apparently less casual about outdated laws or had worded their regulations without differenciating carefully between adults and children. This fortunate oversight was called to the attention of educators and legislators, and they moved quickly to restore their ancient prerogatives.

Enter the gallant three-way psychologist wearing the shining helmet of promoting human welfare over his lab cap of the mad scientist. Dr. Joseph Antonitis of the University of Maine wrote a letter to the editor. It was published under the title: PROBING 1984

> As a psychologist who has conducted experiments on the effects of punishment, I know that punishment works. When properly applied it may lead to quick conditioning of fear. I have not however, punished many children - mostly mice and rats.
>
> In one experiment, for example, I gave newly weaned mice ten electric shocks per day in a small enclosure for almost four weeks. After two or three days these mice resisted being put into the enclosure, but once inside they sat motionless, immobilized by fear, the great cintroller of all behavior. Why the little buggers lost weight, I have no idea; perhaps they ate less or had increased gastric dysfunction. I didn't have time to watch them in their home cages.
>
> Their control twins, littermates, who were never shocked, scampered uncontrollably about and grew sleek and normally plump. Of course I could not determine if the motionless mice could better learn their ABC's, since they were mice, not children. To find out, if I were an interested teacher, I could repeat the experiment with children in a kindergarten class. At the start of a new school year I would divide the class into two equal groups. Half the children would get ten hearty lashes each with a short whip to start off their school day every day, and the other half of the children would go unlashed. If the children reacted like my mice did, in a few days half of them should be sitting motionless at their desks for the whole school day and I could then test whether I could better fill their meek little heads with wisdom than the heads of the actives ones. And I could also check on their appetites for hot school lunches.
>
> I applaud the legislators for considering bills to restore corporal punishment to the schools of Maine - especially without parental permission. Such action will encourage inquiring psychologists like myself to conduct further experiments with legal carte blanche on the effects of punishment on developing children. George Orwell was only guessing as to what punishment does to people. We need to really find out.

The prohibition in Maine held firm. They even nixed another bill permitting so-called Christian schools from permitting paddling with parent's permission..

In Ohio the situation is absurd. Local option is not permitted. Thus if Columbus or Cincinnati should wish to abolish corporal punishment in their schools, they could not do so. For several years the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women, led by a reporter with an honorary award from tne Mental Health Association for her writings, conducted a survey in the Dayton area, documented incidents, listed infractions that merited paddling, compiled opinions and attitudes of teachers and much more. They tried and failed to get a bill through the Ohio legislature permitting inservice training in alternatives. Finally they gave up. Now two more groups have taken up the torch. The American Friends Service Committee of Dayton and the Ohio School Psychological Assn. are writing, speaking, lobbying and gaining converts for a local option bill that would permit local school boards to abolish and individual parents to forbid. School psychologists, the first to see and assess the damage done to school morale by the overhanging threat of swats, are taking the lead.

In Tucson, Arizona, A va liant effort to abolish failed but the governor appointed a commission to write guidelines. An M.A. psychologist got himself appointed to the commission because he had spoken out. He tried to persuade his fellow commissioners to include the California regulation that requires parental approval before physical punishment. Failing that, he secured agreement that parents may say "no." With other safeguards, such as only with a witness, keeping a written record, as a last resort after all other measures have been tried etc., the rubber hoses now in use will atrophy and the children of Arizona will have a fighting chance of coming through their required years of education comparatively unscathed.

The tremendous reduction of brutality in the schools of Dallas, Tx., is due, at least in part, to the willingness of a psychologist at the Timberlawn Psychiatric Center to support citizen activists. He was willing to speak when only six people came to the original protest meeting.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, a psychologist used an eleven room school as an experiment in changing over from a screaming punitive madhouse to a more or less orderly token economy arrangement. Overall he was successful, yet he proved willing to admit the boo-boos, especially the problem of how to handle the failures - those who did not earn tokens. His was an experiment, a therapy, and a promotion of child welfare. He wore three hats handily. His primary conclusion: experiments in the real world are not as neat as those constructed in the laboratory.

On the other hand, some psychologists let opportunities slip. Here is a letter from a psychologist in middle America, an unhappy example of the passive acceptance of evil:

> I am treated to the sound of the paddle every day that I test in this school. Finally after months of listening to the children silently accept the blows, one child protested. I must admit that it pleased me that someone finally reacted the way I would, even t though the brutality of the whole situation was sickening.

> The child I was testing was from a neighboring school and he was completely traumatized by the whole thing. He told it to his room teacher who inadvertently taped his whole colorful description of the paddled child screaming out and begging for the beating to stop, while the principal shouted, "You want five more licks boy?"
>
> For the life of me I cannot understand why any of the teachers ever send their students to him for discipline since it is quite obvious what happens. These children are beaten for minor infractions; it is not in self defense.

This psychologist is employed by a well known university and may or may not have tenure problems. But there must be ways of handling this other than by wincing in silence. Perhaps assertiveness training for psychologists in the art of the courteous but firm and helpful intervention in such situations might be appropriate.

Because time and space do not permit more illustrations, there is appended a list of activities that can fulfill the sometimes neglected promotion of human welfare - or ombudsmanship that psychologists can engage in while retaining their preferred status as scientist and professional. All are or have been implemented somewhere by many hatted psychologists.

HOW TO BE A CHILD ADVOCATE AND FUNCTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST TO STOP THE "Suicidal Dance of Violence."

As an experimentalist:

Field research and in-depth studies are needed. We do not need more experiments designed to discover if punishment "works." Let us agree that it promotes an immediate, intense, shivering quietude in a small frightened child. It teaches avoidance, escape and eventual retaliation, oftnest on other weaker targets. Before beginning experiments or controlled observations, we need to clarify our goals, both immediate and long range to determine what behaviors we wish to enhance and which to minimize. What, in other words, are the goals of education? Pertinent research would determine if there are non-violent methods of promoting learning, diligence and good citizenship.

We need in depth studies, following Bakan's Slaughter of the Innocents to determine the relationship of battering at the buttocks and the repeated suggestions that this is, or leads to, perversion, masochism, sadism. We need characterological studies of the excessive punishers to determine the cluster of rigid beliefs, their origin and effect.

As an academician:

Teachers of educational and social psychology need to include sections on child abuse, both familial and institutional, the history of the gradual attrition of torture and painful punishments and the reasons for the strange situation now present when all sections of society, even' prisoners, are protected against legal abuse, all that is except children.

More symposia need to be organized around these topics; more theses written and more semester reports at all levels.

As a clinician:

Include study of the punishment history of troubled children in every assesment. It is not enough to assume spanking to be the norm in American homes and schools and to dismiss it as unimportant or perhaps even salutary. This is, of course, one possibility, but aggressive delinquents are known to have grown from abusive childhoods. The severity of physical punishments and the timing ranges from mild once in a childhood to gross and constant. Attention to these histories and the possible high adrenaline levels they may induce cannot be overlooked in studying and prescribing for disturbed children.

As a promoter of human welfare

Psychologists are called upon to provide expertise, to speak to Parent Teacher groups, to testify in courts and legislatures, to write, to consult with schools boards and school administrators. As such an expert, it is wise to be as well informed as possible. Although research has not provided all the answers, a search of the literature reveals that all the giants of psychological theory agree that corporal punishment is ill advised and counter-productive. Freud, Adler, Watson, Skinner, the Humanists, Developmentalists, and most recently, Piaget and Eric Berne have written, each from his own point of view, that there are better ways.

Conviction is not enough. There must be affirmative action to make known psychological findings and to popularize alternatives.

For more information consult the Center for the Study of Corporal Punishment and Alternatives in Schools, Irwin Hyman, Director at Temple University and End Violence Against the Next Generation, Inc. 977 Keeler, Berkeley, Ca. 94708

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NOTE: This is probably inadequate since I do not have the text I sent you. These references are from my notes. If more references are needed, or they need to be numbered, please return the copy I sent you, or a copy thereof with requested citations indicated.

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